

19-09-2015

To,
Shri. Narendra Modi
The Hon. Prime Minister,
Government of India

Copy to: Shri. Arun Jaitley
Minister of Information and Broadcasting

Sir,

India has always been to the world a place of stunning cultural and racial diversity. As the world's largest democracy, its rich and nuanced heritage is more impressive for having stemmed from a dizzying spectrum of art, language, cinema and literature. Historically, the Indian nation has assimilated starkly different cultural sensibilities to great effect, blending tolerance and camaraderie in an admirable way. India is poised on the world stage as a rapidly growing economic superpower, it is thus imperative that an environment of tolerance, respect and fundamental freedom is allowed to flourish in every sphere. Nowhere is this more necessary than in the universities and institutes of learning, where original thought and creative potency hinge precariously on academic autonomy.

Recent events in the country have, however, been in conflict with this ideal. At this juncture, we as concerned individuals residing in the United States are distraught at the growing trend of restrictive academic policies and partisan appointments to academic positions, with specific reference to the crisis at the Film and Television Institute of India (FTII), Pune.

The action of your government in installing individuals whose qualifications are arbitrary at best as members of the Governing Council at FTII is regrettable and seems motivated mostly by their allegiance to the BJP. The credentials of these hires, including Mr. Gajendra Chauhan (candidate for chair of the Governing Body), Ms. Anagha Ghaisas, Mr. Narendra Pathak, Mr. Pranjal Saikia, and Mr. Rahul Solapurkar are dubious in the extreme.

We take this opportunity to express our solidarity with the protesting students of FTII. We support their concerns regarding the potential creative decline of the institute following the appointment of ill-qualified candidates to crucial positions at FTII. We further express our concern at the persistent interference of the government in the functioning of other premier institutes such as ICHR, ICCR, NFDC, NBT, CBFC, Prasar Bharati, the IIMs and the IITs, among others.

Today, as we mark the 100th day of the FTII Students' Strike, we urge you to take immediate action to dissolve the standoff between the students and the state. We ask that you engage with the students and initiate an open-minded dialogue to address their concerns which are both pertinent and serious. In this regard, we strongly condemn the use of police force on peacefully protesting students and deplore high handed approaches that have caused the students to resort to an indefinite hunger strike in a bid to be heard.

The Film and Television Institute of India, the premier film school of the nation, has been invaluable not only to the film industry but also to the cultural sphere of the Indian subcontinent and other Afro-Asian countries as a breeding ground for talent from around the world. For half a century it has continued to produce film makers who are renowned the world over. It is sad indeed that the students of one of the best film schools in the world are struggling to have their legitimate concerns addressed.

It is our sincere hope that you and your government begin a dialogue with the students of FTII, and resolve the crisis in a way that upholds academic and institutional autonomy. We trust that you will be able to arrive at a solution that reflects your commitment to the future of Indian cinema as well as India's cultural integrity as a modern nation.

Name	Location	University/Group/Company	Position
Noam Chomsky	Cambridge MA USA	MIT	Professor
Sheldon Pollock	New York, USA.	Columbia University	Arvind Raghunathan Professor of South Asian Studies
Bhaskar Sarkar	California, USA	UC Santa Barbara	Associate Professor, Film and Media Studies
Paula Chakravartty	New York, New York, USA	New York University	Associate Professor, Department of Media, Culture and Communication
Pankaj Mehta	Boston, MA	Boston University	Associate Professor
Amit Baishya	Norman, Oklahoma	University of Oklahoma	Assistant Professor
Partha Chatterjee	New York, USA	Columbia University	Professor of Anthropology
Sunaina Maira	Oakland, US	UC Davis	Professor, Asian American Studies
Dr. Anjali Arondekar	Los Angeles, CA, USA	University of California, Santa Cruz	Associate Professor
Ritty Lukose	New York, NY USA	New York University	Associate Professor
Pranav Jani	Columbus Ohio, USA	Ohio State University	Associate Professor
Jinee Lokaneeta	New York	Drew University, NJ	Associate Professor
Raza Mir	New Jersey, USA	William Paterson University	Professor of Management, Cotsakos College of Business
Ania Loomba	Philadelphia	University of Pennsylvania	Professor
Tithi Bhattacharya	USA	Purdue University	Associate Professor, History
Snehal Shingavi	USA	University of Texas	Associate Professor
Satadru Sen	New York, USA	City University of New York	Professor of History
Waqas Khwaja	Lilburn, GA, USA	Agnes Scott College	Professor of English and Postcolonial Studies
Toorjo Ghose	Philadelphia	University of Pennsylvania	Professor
Joel Andreas	Baltimore, MD USA	Johns Hopkins University	Associate Professor
Paul R. Greenough	Iowa, USA	University of Iowa	Professor
Madhavi Murty	Santa Cruz, CA, USA	University of California, Santa Cruz	Assistant Professor
Kamala	San Diego, CA	University of California, San Diego	Professor
Vijay Prashad	Hartford, Connecticut, USA	Trinity College	George and Martha Kellner Chair in South Asian History and Professor of International Studies
Suvir Kaul	Philadelphia, USA		Professor
Nagesh Rao	New York, USA.	Colgate University	Lecturer
Nilanjana Bhattacharjya	Tempe, AZ, USA	Arizona State University	Honors Faculty Fellow
Chandan Reddy	Seattle, WA, USA	University of Washington, Seattle	Associate Professor, Dept. of English
Samantha Agarwal	Baltimore, United States	Johns Hopkins University	Doctoral Student
Rajita Menon	Boston, USA	Boston University	Ph.D candidate
Rashi Verma	Boston, USA	Boston University	Graduate Student
Mukund Varma	Cambridge, MA, USA	Broad Institute of MIT and Harvard	Computational biologist
Chirag Mital	New York, USA	Columbia University	Graduate Student
Manuel Buen-Abad	Boston, MA, USA	Boston University	Graduate Student, RA
Andrea Massari	New York, USA	Stony Brook University	Research Assistant
Raghav G Jha	Syracuse, NY, USA	Syracuse University	PhD Student in Physics
Abhishek Bhattacharyya	Chicago, Illinois, USA.	University of Chicago	PhD student; organiser with Graduate Students United (AFT/AAUP))
Faizan Jawed Siddiqi	Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA	Massachusetts Institute of Technology	Doctoral Candidate
Abhishodh Prakash	Stony Brook, NY, USA	Stony Brook University	PhD student
Zoya Vallari	New York, USA	Stony Brook University	PhD Student
Tanima	Chicago	University of Chicago	PhD student
Maryam Fatima	Amherst, MA, USA	University of Massachusetts, Amherst	Teaching Assistant/PhD student
Shreyas Patankar	Berkeley, California, USA	University of California, Berkeley	Graduate Student

Sohini Manna	California, USA	University of California, San Diego	Phd student
Tamara Kamatovic	Chicago/Illinois, USA	University of Chicago	Graduate Student
Madeleine Elfenbein	Chicago, IL, USA	University of Chicago	Ph.D. student
Milind Shyani	California, USA	UC Santa Barbara	PhD in Physics
Tejas Parasher	Chicago, United States	The University of Chicago	PhD Student
Jenisha	Chicago	University of Chicago	Graduate Student
Surbhi Goel	Austin, TX, United States	University of Texas at Austin	PhD Student
Michael Hazoglou	New York, USA	Stony Brook University	Graduate student
Afreen Gandhi	USA	Smith college	Student
Abhinav Parihar	Atlanta, GA, USA	Georgia Institute of Technology	PhD Student
Nicholas Lubbers	Boston, MA, USA	Boston University	Graduate student
Abhay Shastri	Tucson/AZ, USA	University of Arizona	Graduate researcher
Alvin Camba	Maryland, USA	Hopkins Sociology	Graduate Student
Daniel Steven Pasciuti	Baltimore	Johns Hopkins University	Assistant Research Scientist
Ashish Bino George	Boston MA, USA	Boston University	PhD. student
Jon Batiste	Santa Cruz, CA/USA	UC Santa Cruz	Student
Joya John	CHICAGO	University of Chicago	Student
Ahona Panda	Chicago	The University of Chicago	Graduate student
Martin Polacek	NYC, New York	Stony Brook University	PhD
Bertus Jordaan	Stony Brook, New York	Stony Brook University	Graduate Research Assistant
Rohan Gala	Boston	Northeastern University	Graduate student
John Quirk	Boston, MA USA	Boston University	Graduate Student, Research Assistant
Saul Thomas	Chicago, IL USA	University of Chicago	Ph.D. Candidate
Mannat Johal	Chicago, IL, USA	University of Chicago	Doctoral student
Jo Brill	Chicago, IL, USA	University of Chicago	Graduate student
Apara Ranjan	California, USA	UC Berkeley	Researcher
Taarini Mookherjee	New York	Columbia University	Graduate Student
Jon Curtiss	Ann Arbor, MI, USA	AFT Michigan, AFL-CIO	Organizer
Kasturi Sen	Philadelphia, PA, USA	Defender Association, Philadelphia	Public Defender
Jonah Simpson	Chicago, IL	University of Chicago	PhD student
Naveen Prabhakar	New York, US	Stony Brook University	Graduate Student
Mathew Madhavacheril	New York, USA	Stony Brook University	Research Project Assistant and PhD Candidate
Darsheel Kaur	Ohio, USA	Eastern Mennonite University	Graduate Student
Shefali Jha	Chicago	University of Chicago	Student
Anup Gampa	Charlottesville, VA, USA	University of Virginia	PhD Student
Harini Kumar	Chicago		Student
Ashwin N Kashyap	Virginia, USA	INCEPT DATA SOLUTIONS	Business Analyst
Charan JP	Long Beach, California, India	California State/ AnimalTrax	Student/Web developer
Vrushali	San Jose, California, USA	EMC Corporation	Senior Software Engineer
Vinyas Maddi	California, USA	VMWare	Software Engineer
Gautham Venugopal	Santa Clara/CA, USA	Apple Inc	Engineer
Ved Pragyan	Folsom, CA, USA	Intel Corporation	Analog Engineer
Marc Kelley	Chicago/Illinois, USA	University of Chicago	
Sai Kulkarni	Boston, USA	Northeastern University	
Tania Bhattacharyya	New York, USA	Columbia University	

Anuja Madan	Gainesville, Florida	University of Florida
Samrit Sangal	Atlanta GA USA	
Pushkar Moni	California, USA	
Pranay Patil	Boston, MA, USA	
Sanjeev Mahajan	Mountain View, California, USA	
Rishi Awatramani	Baltimore, MD, USA	
Divya	California	
Satbir Singh	Florida	
Shalini Keshavamurthy	California, USA	
Monika Mehta	Ithaca, New York, USA	
Phillippa Hayes	Chicago, Il	
Madhusudan Mohan Laguduva	Dallas	
Amritjit SINGH	Ohio, USA	
Rajeev Ravisankar	Columbus, Ohio, USA	
Nagendra Kumar	Boston/Massachusetts/ USA	
Neel Kshetramade	San Francisco, CA, USA	
Kavita Philip	Irvine	
Gyan Pandey	USA	
Divya Menon	New York, USA	
Kamil Ahsan	Chicago, IL	
William Hunt	Austin, Texas	
Abhay Deshpande	New York, USA	
Atreyee Gohain	Jacksonville, FL	
Karishma Mansukhani	Bryn Mawr/PA, USA	
Sanjukta Poddar	Chicago	
Taki Manolakos	Ohio, USA	
Atreyi Dasgupta	Houston/TX/USA	

As a physicist, a student, and an Indian, I am deeply uncomfortable with the interference of the Modi government with the functioning of institutions of higher learning. I hereby express my support for the students of FTII and hope that their voices are heard.

- Rajita Menon

Placing ill-qualified individuals in positions of power at academic institutions is nothing short of a crime. Besides being unfair to the truly deserving, it's a huge blow to the education of an entire generation. Putting a harness on such institutions is like stifling all creativity and potential in young minds.

- Rashi Verma

For institutions of excellence to remain excellent, it is important that they are led by individuals who can not only administer the day-to-day activities of the university or college, but also inspire the students to aspire towards greater goals. I don't believe Mr. Gajendra Chauhan has the necessary qualifications or stature in the film industry to lead India's premier film institute.

- Mukund Varma

Politically influenced appointments to the governing bodies of educational institutes like FTII endanger two basic tenets of the Indian democracy as guaranteed by the Constitution

1. LIBERTY of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship:

Students and faculty may not be able to exercise these liberties under duress.

2. EQUALITY of status and of opportunity;

Considerations of merit, education and qualification must be made before appointing educators who are supposed to lead the youth of this country. Politicizing educational institutions is against the spirit and the letter of the Constitution of India, which you took an oath to uphold.

- Sai Kulkarni

This is a premier institute and should remain that way. No political propaganda must taint it.

- Vrushali

Sub-par appointments to important academic posts to favor party politics will hamper the quality of education in academic institutions. This government has been quite brazen about it's 'don't give a damn' attitude towards dissenters, which is very troubling. The FTII protest is symbolic of a stance against such partisan politics and against a general apathy towards civil liberties and freedom of speech.

- Vinyas Maddi

Appointing mediocre people (arbitrarily) to high administrative positions in educational and cultural institutions only undermines the reputation of those institutions. Here is hoping that common sense prevails.

- Chirag Mital

Art is Freedom. Kill Freedom, and you kill Art. Put chains on Art and Freedom is chained with it.

- Manuel Buen-Abad

Shackling culture harms India and the entire world.

- Andrea Massari

Institutions of excellence should be not treated with political motive.

- Raghav G Jha

Places of learning should be mentored by people who inspire learning not bigotry and hate. No saffron in my textbooks please.

- Abhishodh Prakash

Being a student, I acknowledge the importance of freedom of thought, expression in an academic campus. Modi Government is brazenly imposing right wing ideologies by appointing its ill-qualified puppets in the important positions at very many institutes and sadly they are getting away with most of it. But the FTII students have put up a brave resistance. I stand in solidarity with all of you but more importantly, I want to thank each one of you for fighting this fight on behalf of all of us. We would face grave consequences if we choose to stay quiet at this moment.

- Zoya Vallari

The government should not let partisan ideology interfere with academia.

- Shreyas Patankar

The youth are the next generation. You musn't/cannot control them.

- Sohini Manna

As a lover of Indian cinema and a fellow student, I support these students' campaign.

- Madeleine Elfenbein

I believe that as a Democratic government, the residing party has the responsibility to not misuse their power and still work with the interest of the diverse people in mind. Appointing their members to further their dictatorial agenda is not fair. We need to join forces and stand up against this injustice.

- Surbhi Goel

This is not even a subtle attempt to control the media. They should be ashamed of themselves.

- Michael Hazoglou

Any prestigious university in the world relies on the independent functioning of its administration and faculty. That is why universities were created in the first place - independence of thought. I do not believe these kinds of moves will strengthen the idea of university in any way.

- Abhinav Parihar

I believe that communities are at their most healthy and stable when they are peacefully self-governing in the sense that administration is responsive to the needs of constituents. The FTII student body is engaging in a cry for help, and it is the responsibility of the elected government to address this cry both as administrators of the country and as the progenitors of their discontent. This is why I believe it is your duty to address their concerns over the appointments at their school.

- Nicholas Lubbers

It is important that academic institutes maintain a bi-directional flow of opinion, student voices are heard and their concerns respected. It is democratic to listen and act on student opinions on leadership when the entire student community is up in protest.

This applies to not only FTII but also the situations at ICHR, ICCR, NFDC, NBT, CBFC, IITs, etc. A certain degree of autonomy is important for the fostering of the diverse creative ideas that can take shape in these communities.

- Ashish Bino George

Academic appointments to such fine institutions cannot be motivated by narrow ideological considerations. While there is much scope for improvement in India's higher education sector, needless meddling with the functioning of premier institutes is not the way to go about it.

- Sanjith Gopalakrishnan

I have been following this protest closely and I feel it's really important that the students are heard and justice prevails.

- Ashwin N Kashyap

Meritocracy over autocracy!

50 fist pumps

Always have extreme faith in student body movements to support a just cause.

- Lavisha Jindal

Any kind of restriction hinders creativity and growth. I personally feel it is the responsibility of the governing council and other related governing agencies to support the growth in a positive manner. This issue matters to me because it will affect education and growth of everyone in the long run. I am worried about India's future.

- Shalini Keshavamurthy

The FTII saga is one of the many instances of government overreach in the recent past. I sincerely urge the government to address the concerns of protesting students. I also believe that such a premier institute as FTII would function best as an autonomous body, and as such any measures taken to remove the FTII from the purview of the Ministry of I&B would go a long way in assuring concerned citizens both in India and abroad, of the Government's intent in allowing creative and intellectual spaces to thrive.

- Gautham Venugopal

This Govt was elected on a single mandate: development. Please dedicate more resources in that regard and leave FTII and other academic institutes alone.

- Jon Batiste

This is a matter of respecting the integrity of our academic institutions and is crucial to maintaining the high standards of intellectual thought, art and culture.

- Ania Loomba

Freedom of expression and academic freedom are some of the most important tools that minorities and underrepresented people have to their disposal to gain equality.

- Bertus Jordaan

Important to have a dialogue with the students and faculty in governance of academic institutions.

- Jinee Lokaneeta

Our institutions should reflect, in their microcosm, a spirit of democracy, cooperation, and yet diversity. The essential component of democracies is dialogue across hierarchies of power, because power comes to those who are elected as representing the best interests of common people. Institutions comprise not only elected officials, but also the common people, and their backbone is students. So it is necessary to alleviate the legitimate concerns and grievances of students, the first step towards which is allowing a conversation to happen.

- Ahona Panda

Hope for liberal and open type of society.

- Martin Polacek

I support the students in their protest against the government's cynical lack of appreciation for the intellectual and professional stature of FTII.

- Partha Chatterjee